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# JOSEPH REED:

A

## HISTORICAL ESSAY.

BY

GEORGE BANCROFT.

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"I saw too glory's holy flowers  
Round common brows profanely twined."

SCHILLER.

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## J O S E P H R E E D :

A HISTORICAL ESSAY.

TWENTY years ago William B. Reed, of Philadelphia, published a life of his grandfather, Joseph Reed, or, as he now styles him, the "President" of Pennsylvania. He had prepared himself for his work by long research, under favorable auspices, and had amassed a storehouse of materials which he opened to others with liberality. An all-pervading zeal for redeeming the memory of his ancestor was obviously the motive which ruled him. The time was favorable; the political animosities which prevailed in the last century had died away; family hostilities had ceased, and the men of this generation scorned to keep alive the personal enmities of the past. Were it not for his family aspirations he would, without a dissenting voice, have been distinguished among contemporary writers on American history. But the analysis of his statements shows that he suffered himself to be carried away by a passion to create an undeserved reputation for one from whom he was sprung. As a historian, I was bound to pronounce a dissenting opinion. Having fulfilled my duty, it could not surprise me, and it could not offend me, that the biographer should en-

deavor to relieve the name of his ancestor, and to vindicate the views which I had overthrown. Once more he undertakes the impossible task of rolling his grandfather's reputation up hill into the position of a leading patriot. I only wish he had conducted the new display of his ardor with an accuracy from which I might have derived instruction, and an equity which need not have required a reply. I have through a long life accustomed myself to look to great and general principles, and never to take part in personal vituperation and asperities. It is my nature to dwell upon that which is generous and great, and to turn away from that which is paltry and mean; and while I do not feel at liberty to temper honest judgment by a desire to win the favor of the descendants of those of whom I write, I always pass over in silence the weaknesses and follies which neither portray the times nor illustrate events. No one but myself knows the candor which I have exercised, for no one else knows what materials have been before me and have been put aside. To be forced into establishing defects of character in another is most irksome; the time consumed in the exposure seems like a waste of life, and now more than ever when so little of life remains to me.

Wishing to husband every moment for the completion of an almost finished volume of American history, for several weeks I refused to see the tract upon "President" Reed, by his grandson, and it was but a few days ago that it was forced upon my attention. The pamphlet contains abundant evidence that the author is conscious of the feebleness of his cause. In his zeal to upset evidence derived from men of honor, who, by no fault of their own, fought against us, but who wrote dispassionately

of scenes which they witnessed, he runs a tilt against the established canons of criticism. To raise a prejudice, he has even the inconceivable weakness, when his grandfather's good repute is in question, to class Riedesel among Hessians, and to throw a slur on Münchhausen for his name. He goes about feeling everywhere to see if by chance he can find some means of exciting against me the prejudice of any man, or community, or section of country. He runs from North to South in the hope to rouse some latent prejudice, that he may have associate accusers. He tries to enlist in his behalf the pride of the honored State of Pennsylvania, by styling his grandfather its "President," though he was born elsewhere, and died in private life, was never chosen President by the direct vote of the people, never protected their good name, and has no right to sequester their glorious deeds to his private benefit. If men of the highest merit have in the course of my narrative appeared as not wholly faultless, he seeks to place his ancestor in the group with the best of them. An author of a history of the republic has exhibited "President" Reed as entering a false plea before the world; the grandson contents himself with leaving the charge unrefuted, and caviling at some inaccuracy in the citation of a letter. The same historian complains of Reed for a want of fidelity to Washington; the pleader, with the folly of a petulant child, thinks it a sufficient reply to assert that another of Washington's secretaries had erred in the same way. Moved by the very natural excitement which comes from seeing the monument which he had erected to the pretended virtues and services of his ancestor crumbling to the dust, the grandson discusses the theme as a subject for invective and personality, though

angry words have not a feather's weight before the tribunal of historical criticism. He exaggerates the charges brought against his grandfather, and will hear of nothing but extreme criminations, as an artful legal practitioner before juries who come and go, but whose verdict for the particular case is final, may be willing to get a culprit acquitted by making it out that the indictment against him charged a little too much. He insists on presenting the question as one of life and death, when the difference between us is in itself too wide to need exaggeration.

William B. Reed describes his grandfather as a prominent and steadfast patriot of the Revolution; I regard him as shuffling, pusillanimous, and irresolute. The grandson elevates him to the position of a disinterested and guiding statesman; I see that he was governed by selfish considerations, and in moments of crisis was of no significance. The grandson esteems him for fidelity and candor; I find his character tainted by duplicity. The grandson exalts him as a hero whose fortitude increased with adversity; I present him as a vacillating trimmer, who in 1774 and 1775 was not heartily in the cause of his country, and who near the end of 1776 meditated defection.

In discussing these topics I shall treat them as a fit subject for scientific investigation. For this purpose I shall have occasion to do little more than produce from my note-books a chronological statement of authenticated facts. I address myself to those who are most familiar with thorough literary criticism and inquiry; or, since the "President" and his grandson belong to the profession which has so largely attracted to its ranks the talent of the country, I will write as though I were addressing our ablest lawyers or the judges of our courts of appeal.

That I may present the subject with distinctness and order, I will first trace the unsteady career of the “President” to the close of 1776; I will next consider if his subsequent general character is such as to rebut the testimony respecting his previous infidelity; and I will lastly explain why it was proper and necessary for the ends of history to hold him up in the light of truth.

## PART FIRST.

For the first part of the examination which I am compelled to undertake, the materials are so abundant that there is no difficulty in establishing my allegations by continuous and irrefragable proofs.

### 1.

After finishing a course of studies in America, Joseph Reed, a native of New Jersey, repaired to the Middle Temple in London. A purpose of settling in England, encouraged by a well-placed affection, continued with more or less of uncertainty during the time of the stamp act and its repeal, and after the law declaring the power of England to bind America in all cases whatsoever, and after Charles Townshend’s taxes on tea, paper, and colors. Meantime De Berdt, who was to have been Reed’s father-in-law, died, and Reed, after marrying in England, definitively settled in Philadelphia. During his stay in

England he formed those relations which, through his brother-in-law, Dennis De Berdt, led to his becoming the volunteer correspondent, or rather the volunteer informer, of Lord Dartmouth, who then, as American minister, controlled the distribution of offices in America. His first letter to Dartmouth, dated the 22d of December, 1773, derives its importance for the present examination only from this: In 1775, Reed fell under a suspicion of playing a double part in these letters, and his defense was: "In my first letter I absolutely disclaimed all office or reward for myself" (Reed, i. 98). Now, in truth, there is in this first letter no disclaimer of office or reward, so that Reed met a charge of duplicity by an answer which had no foundation in fact; and there was the less occasion for so great a misstatement, as he kept a copy of his letters.

## 2.

The British laws of trade, most oppressive to the colonies, have been truly described by British statesmen as "a system of robbing and plundering themselves," so injurious were they to the mere commercial interests of Great Britain. There is no reason that I know of to believe that Reed expressed anywhere in America an approval of them, or made a defense of the Court of Admiralty; and from his position he was naturally classed with those who complained of them. On the 4th of April, 1774, Reed explained to Lord Dartmouth how very improper were the appointments of the officers in the Court of Admiralty, not excepting even the judge, whom in his letter, though not in the printed copy of it, he described as "a disappointed stamp officer." Such appointments, he said, were "certain to invite opposition

and insure contempt;" and, he added, "the due observance of the laws of trade is so essential to the interests of the mother-country, that nothing tending to weaken or enforce them is beneath notice" (Reed, i. 58). It is not possible to write more strongly on the British side. Such opinions would never have been given to any one, least of all to a British minister, by any statesman of New York, Virginia, or South Carolina, or by any true-hearted American patriot. And it must be admitted that Reed could never have uttered them publicly in Philadelphia.

## 3.

Early in 1774, as matters approached a crisis, and the patriots of the country needed a free interchange of sentiments, it became unsafe for them to use the established post-office, which was in the hands of the servants of the king. They therefore proposed a system of their own; but this measure, whether it met with public countenance from Reed in Philadelphia or not, was privately and repeatedly disapproved of by him in his letters to Dartmouth.

## 4.

In the same year, when all the colonies, one after another, held conventions to discuss measures for the relief of Boston, suffering under the Port Act, and to sustain Massachusetts in resisting the violation of her charter, Pennsylvania too held its convention. The country people brought down word of the spirit and zeal that prevailed in the interior, but, through an influence exerted on the convention in the city of Philadelphia, their proceedings were comparatively tame.

On the 18th of July, Reed, who was a member of the convention, sent an account of its doings to Dartmouth, and purged himself of the guilt of disaffection. His words are: "Some resolutions have been framed by this convention as expressive of the sense of the Province, which I hoped to have been able to have sent you by this conveyance. Several of them, I make no doubt, will sound strangely from this Province, which has hitherto been distinguished for its moderation. As I had an opportunity of opposing them in that assembly, I thought it my duty to do so, but it was in vain" (Reed, i. xvi.). Thus it appears that in midsummer, 1774, Reed took part in America in the general uprising, but reported himself to the British minister as having done his "duty" by opposing all that was most spirited in its proceedings. The record is conclusive as to his interior sentiments at that time. To have been even more moderate than the moderate convention which left the direction of affairs to the proprietary assembly, may not have been dishonorable, if he had but been so avowedly; but to wear the mask of patriotism, and yet to report himself to the British Secretary of State as in opposition to the patriots, passes the bounds of honorable conduct.

## 5.

All this time Reed used the strongest language of the foremost patriots, and professed to have a zeal as exuberant as that of the most impassioned. Toward the end of 1774, he writes to Quincy of Boston, then in England: "There is a band of stanch, chosen sons of liberty, among some of our best families, who are backed by the body of the people in such a manner that no discontented spirit dares oppose the measures necessary for

the public safety. I am more afraid of New York. I wish you would endeavor to animate them" (Reed, i. 86). Such was the face which he wore to the advanced patriots, among whom there was a very general desire to make preparations for resistance so as to be able to repel force by force. Accordingly the Pennsylvania convention, which on the 3d of January, 1776, met in Philadelphia, elected Joseph Reed their president. Again yielding to the powerful influence exerted in Philadelphia against the necessary measures of counteraction, the convention refused to take any steps towards military preparations. At once Reed, the president of the convention, in a letter to Lord Dartmouth, took the credit of the defeat in a great measure to himself, as follows: "I hope and believe I have already been instrumental in preventing some measures of an irritating tendency. It had been intended to take some steps toward arming and disciplining the province, a measure which I opposed, both publicly and privately" (Reed's Reed, i. 93, 94). But he did not stop there. He accompanied this letter with a further exposition of his views and aspirations to his brother-in-law, De Berdt, who was his channel of communication with Dartmouth: "I was compelled, much against my inclination, to be chairman of our late provincial congress, to which I have alluded in the beginning of my letter. This circumstance will lead him to consider me in the light of a factious, turbulent person, unworthy his further notice, and improper for him to correspond with, or *as a person* who acts uprightly on mistaken principles, and has some weight and influence with the province, which in time may be of use to government *when he sees his error*, or the present causes of dissatisfaction shall be removed, and *whom*, upon the

whole, *Government might wish to be on their side*" (Reed, i. 97).

These procedures are in conflict with the requirements of honor. In Philadelphia Reed's zeal is such that he is made President of the Pennsylvania Convention, while he secretly lets Dartmouth know that his influence in that body was used for the British interest, and he gives a hint that he is getting ready to become an acquisition of the British government.

## 6.

In the early summer of 1775, very exaggerated opinions prevailed in Philadelphia of the strength of the New England army around Boston. In July Reed goes to New England on the staff of Washington, but remains with him only about four months, as his military secretary. In that time he greatly won the confidence of Washington, toward whom he professed the sincerest fidelity. In January, 1776, Thomas Paine published "Common Sense," and Washington, Greene, John Adams, Gadsden, Franklin, Rush, and all the advanced patriots saw and avowed the necessity, the rightfulness, and the policy of declaring independence. On the sixteenth of February, Reed appeared in his place in the proprietary assembly of Pennsylvania, and took the oath of allegiance to George the Third in its full force. Franklin avoided taking that oath, by declining a seat in the assembly. I say nothing in praise or blame of Reed's consenting to take the oath in February, 1776; but his efforts in the legislature brought no good to the popular cause.

## 7.

The course of events proved the need of subverting the proprietary government in Pennsylvania. Had

Reed remained in the assembly he would have been compelled to have chosen his side, and to have acted with or against John Adams, on the question whether Pennsylvania should take up a government of its own. The responsibility proved too much for his nerves.

He therefore escaped from the dilemma by rejoining the army, and he himself gives as his reason : "I have been much induced to this measure by observing that this province will be a great scene of party and contention this summer" (Reed, i. 190). He left everybody in Philadelphia to class him among the foremost in the band of patriots; and when Pennsylvania for the first time secured its adhesion to Congress by a series of measures which destroyed the proprietary government and substituted a government by the people, Reed, after much time for deliberation, secretly wrote to one who had been a warm friend to the proprietary government and an opponent to the Declaration of Independence: "I could not agree in most of the changes which have been made in our province."

## 8.

On the 4th of July, Congress made that declaration which proclaimed the independence of the United States, and thrilled the world with astonishment and delight by the prophecy of universal freedom. On the 4th of July, Joseph Reed, the American Adjutant-General, after having been in the camp less than three weeks, gives us a glimpse into his inner mind, and the class of motives by which he was ruled, in the following extract of a letter to a member of Congress :

"With an army of force before, and a secret one behind, we stand on a point of land with six thousand old troops (if a year's service of

about half, can entitle them to the name), and about fifteen hundred new levies of this province, many disaffected and more doubtful. In this situation we are: every man in the army, from the general to the private (acquainted with our true situation), is exceedingly disengaged. *Had I known the true posture of affairs, no consideration would have tempted me to have taken an active part of this scene;* and this sentiment is universal" (Gordon, ii. 278).

## 9.

With such antecedents, it is not surprising that he was one of the channels through which an overture for a negotiation for submission was transmitted to congress. We have seen that in February, 1775, Reed, through Dennis De Berdt, recommended himself to the British minister "as a person whom upon the whole government might wish to be upon their side." From that same Dennis De Berdt, Lord Howe brought a letter to Joseph Reed, which, as we know from Reed himself, though it had the appearance of a mere private letter, "was not intended merely as such." Lord Howe was anxious for a compromise, or, as it was usually called, an "accommodation" with America. In De Berdt's letter to Reed occurs this passage: "My Lord Howe is not unacquainted with your name. I have so high an opinion of your abilities and honor, and have had such repeated instances of your friendship and affection, that every thing has been said by me that you can desire or expect; and I have not a doubt if a treaty or parley is brought about in which you may be engaged, every degree of respect you can desire, or attention you can wish, will be shown you." (Reed's Reed, i. 198.) Fourteen days after the declaration of independence, Reed was ready to take a part in "a parley or treaty" with the Howes, of which the avowed object was to lead the colonies back into

a state of dependence. He expressed "a fear" that congress had taken its decision "irrevocably." It is very true, subtle lawyer as he was, that he couched his offer under most cautious reservations; but a few hours before congress voted that the declaration of independence should be engrossed on parchment and signed by every one of its members, he wrote to one who had voted against independence: "My principles have been much misunderstood if they were supposed to militate against reconciliation." J. Reed to R. Morris, 18 July, 1776, in Reed's Reed, i. 199. He expressed a hope that the overture of the Howes might be improved into a negotiation, and avowed his willingness to "take such a post as my situation and abilities will admit, and as may be directed" (Reed, i. 199). Seven days after the vote of congress that every one of its members should sign the declaration of independence, the heart of Joseph Reed was not with them, for he could still write: "I am very sorry to see such a general disinclination even to hear of accommodation" (Reed's Reed, i. 209).

## 10.

While the members of congress jointly and severally wrote their names where time can never efface them, and where they shine like the stars on our beautiful flag, as they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to the cause of independence, Reed, who, as he said of himself, "knew too much of their situation to be very sanguine," confessed it still much against his inclination that Lord Howe would not lead the country back to a state of dependence by conforming his written declarations to his verbal ones; and he predicted that if misfortunes should depreciate the currency "the army

is gone." (Reed's Reed, i. 211, 215.) Nor is it an answer to say that Reed, who was a skilful lawyer, and understood the use of words when he put his thoughts on paper, did it with circumspection and reserve; and still less is it an answer to say that in the company of patriots he played the part of a patriot. Had his language and conduct been harmonious and uniform, there would have been no ground for charging him with duplicity; but let us hasten on.

## 11.

From his want of fixed principles and his despondency, it is natural to suppose that Reed was eager to get out of the public service, and it was so. In the month of September, he deliberately resolved to throw up his commission in the army; but how to do it without publicly branding himself with dishonor, was not easy to be devised. A high officer in the army could hardly retire without observation, at a moment when the army was outnumbered and severely pressed. He did not dare to communicate his purpose to Washington; but silently brooded upon it in his own mind, until at last he roused himself to a decisive step. (Force, 5th Series, ii., fols. 826, 827.)

A committee of congress had been at head-quarters to inquire into the state of the army. He let them come and stay and finish their visit, and kept his own counsels. When they were gone, on the first of October, Joseph Reed, without consulting Washington, sent to them his resignation in a long letter, of which the substance is, that he demanded to be relieved, and, to use his own words, "the sooner the better" (Force, v. ii., 826-'7). But this letter is otherwise noteworthy as a

proof of his insincerity. He will have it, on the one hand, that he “resigns with a single eye to the public service and welfare;” and yet he confesses that General Washington doubtless would think the public interest required him to remain. The two statements are in manifest contradiction ; and he knew it.

## 12.

Danger grew nearer and nearer. The committee of congress and congress itself took no notice whatever of his application to retire ; but we know from Joseph Reed himself that every succeeding circumstance had confirmed him in his intention to resign his office of Adjutant-General. The service of the United States offered at that time no flattering emoluments, no career that could tempt ambition. There was nothing that could bind an officer to the service but zeal for the cause or a love of fame. On the 11th of October, Joseph Reed wrote to his wife : “ You ask me what I propose to do ? It is a difficult question to answer. My idea is shortly this, that if France or some other foreign power does not interfere, or some feuds arise among the enemy’s troops, we shall not be able to stand next spring. \* \* \* But if the enemy should make a vigorous push, I would not answer for our success at any time. \* \* \* I have not the least desire to sacrifice you and them [my dear children] to fame. \* \* \* My estate is no object of confiscation, my rank is not so high as to make me an example. \* \* \* From what I can learn from Philadelphia, there is a considerable party for absolute and unconditional submission. \* \* \* A person must be in the secret to know the worst of our affairs ” (Reed, i. 243).

## 13.

There remained, indeed, very little to rely upon except the wisdom, decision, and fortitude of Washington. On the 21st of November, Reed avowed his want of confidence in Washington, and complained of him as having an indecisive mind, such as "is one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall an army;" and he wrote that he had "often lamented it this campaign" (Lee's Memoirs, 178, 179; Moore's Treason of Lee, 44-46).

## 14.

Washington was a man bent on maintaining independence by persevering efforts in the field; Lee was a man bent on surrendering independence by negotiations with the British commissioners. Reed seized the opportunity of his infidelity to Washington to make his confidential relations with Lee more close and intimate than ever (Lee's Memoirs, 179).

## 15.

We have arrived at the time when the intentions of Reed were openly betrayed. Washington was at Newark, environed by difficulties. It was the darkest hour of the retreat through the Jerseys. Bad as the state of affairs was when Reed desponded in October, and attempted to leave the army, things had grown worse, very much worse, and there was need of extraordinary and exemplary fortitude and energy on the part of officers to call out the strength of New Jersey and of Pennsylvania. Mifflin and Reed were selected to make impassioned appeals and earnest solicitations: the former to the people of Pennsylvania; the latter, a native of Trenton, to the legislature of New Jersey. Mifflin executed the office intrusted to him undauntedly, perseveringly, and

successfully. Reed was sent on the 23d or the 24th of November, that is, two days or three after his avowal of want of confidence in Washington, with a letter, dated the 23d of November, to the governor and legislature of New Jersey, saying: "The critical situation of our affairs, and the movements of the enemy, make some further and immediate exertions absolutely necessary;" and the governor was referred to Reed, who as Adjutant-General was in the secret of the weakness of the army, to give him the particulars. Reed arrived at Burlington on or about the 25th, where he found his wife and family. On the 28th, the day on which Washington was forced to retreat from Newark, without the knowledge and against the expectation of his chief, and in betrayal of the trust reposed in him, he renounced the service. On the 1st of October he had resigned his office by letter, and had not succeeded, his communication receiving no answer or notice. This time he took the very unusual and very effectual course of getting rid of his commission, by inclosing the instrument itself to congress. He had been sent from camp on a special duty in that hour which "tried men's souls"—in that hour which "tried men's souls" more than any former one; and he seized the moment of his country's most desperate weakness, and his own absence from camp on special and most important public duty, to retire abruptly and absolutely from the service.

Here is a literal copy of his letter of resignation, taken from the files of Congress, to which it went in the due course of business, and where it has been preserved to the present time:

"SIR—Near three Months ago I laid before the Committee of Hon. Congress appointed to form and regulate the New Army,

my Intentions of relinquishing the Office of Adjutant-General at the Close of the Campaign. The Reasons I then assigned, and which I should intrude upon your Time to repeat, appeared to me so weighty, that I conceived it a Duty to the Publick and myself to represent them in the earliest and fullest manner.

"As the season will not admit of further military Operations (unless the Enemy should attempt an Incursion into this Province to harass and distress us, in which Case I shall most cheerfully devote myself to any farther service), I beg Leave to inclose the Commission, with the highest sense and warmest Acknowledgments of the Favor done me—and am,

"Sir, your most obdt. &  
" very Hble. Servt.,

"Jos. REED.

"BURLINGTON, November 28, 1776.

"To the Hon. John Hancock, Esq.,

"Board of the Hon. Continental Congress, Philadelphia."

On this letter the first thing to be remarked is its inexactness as to time. Instead of having sent his resignation to the committee of congress "near three months ago," it was less than two. Next, is his erroneous statement of the time at which he had wished his first of October resignation to take effect; he now dares to say it was to have been "at the close of the campaign," when, in truth, he had written, "the sooner the better." Further, the excuse which he feigns is worthy of animadversion. He was the Adjutant-General of the army, knew that Washington was vainly struggling to make a stand at Newark; that he was seeking to draw to his own force the militia of New Jersey, the detachment under Lee, such aid as congress could stand, such aid as Mifflin could draw from Pennsylvania, and such aid as could be spared from the northern army; and he was himself sent, according to Washington's words, on special duty, "on the retreat, to rouse

and animate the assembly of New Jersey to spirited measures for our support;" and yet he pretends that he resigns because the season admits "no further military operations."

Meantime a letter from General Lee to Joseph Reed arrived at head-quarters, and, being addressed to the Adjutant-General, was opened as a public letter. In that letter occurred these words: "My Dear Reed—I received your most obliging, flattering letter; lament with you that fatal indecision of mind which in war is a much greater disqualification than stupidity, or even want of personal courage. Accident may put a decisive blunderer in the right; but eternal defeat and miscarriage must attend the man of the best parts if cursed with indecision" (Lee to Reed, November 24, 1776, in *Force*, iii., 831). Some time in the night between the 1st and 2d of December, Reed received this letter of Lee, inclosed in the following one from General Washington:

"BRUNSWICK, November 30, 1776.

"DEAR SIR:—The inclosed was put into my hands by an express from the White Plains. Having no idea of its being a private letter, much less suspecting the tendency of the correspondence, I opened it, as I had done all other letters to you from the same place and Peckskill, upon the business of your office, as I conceived and found them to be.

"This, as it is truth, must be my excuse for seeing the contents of a letter which neither inclination or intention would have prompted me to.

"I thank you for the trouble and fatigue you have undergone in your journey to Burlington, and sincerely wish that your labors may be crowned with the desired success. My best respects to Mrs. Reed.

"I am, dear sir, your most obedient servant,

"GEO. WASHINGTON.

"To JOSEPH REED, Esq., Adjutant-General, Burlington."  
(*Force*, iii. 921.)

The words of Washington are seemingly mild, and even apologetic, but in form and in substance they convey, as others have said, the coldest and most cutting rebuke, from which Reed did not recover for many months, if indeed he ever fully recovered. In this letter Washington abstains from his former usual language of friendship, avows that he is aware of Reed's intrigue with Lee, and, moreover, reminds Reed of the special and as yet unfulfilled duty intrusted to him. With such reproof ringing in his ears, and with a reminder of the censure pronounced on officers who slunk away from the army in time of danger, Reed, on the second of December, wrote once more to the President of Congress. Of this letter the following is an exact copy from the archives of Congress:

“BURLINGTON, December 2, 1776.

“SIR:—When I did myself the Honour of addressing you on the 30th ult. I had not the least Idea that the Enemy would at this Season attempt a Progress thro the Country.—It seems but too probable that I was mistaken.—I therefore beg Leave to retract the Resignation I then made & as soon as I have disposed of Mrs. Reed & my children will attend my Office in the Army untill a Successor is appointed or Operations shall cease beyond all Doubt.

“Flattering myself that an uninterrupted Attention for Six Months & my conduct during that Time will incline you to the most favourable Construction of this Measure which proceeded from our unacquaintance with the State of Things, I am

“With great Respect, Sir,

“Your most obed. & very  
“Hble. Serv<sup>t</sup>.

“JOS. REED.”

On this letter there is again occasion to observe Reed's want of exactness and truth. His letter to Congress was of the 28th of November, and he says it was of the

30th. Then as to the reason he assigns for his resignation and its withdrawal, neither the one nor the other has any foundation in fact, but is directly contrary to it. The enemy were pursuing Washington then, just as they were when Reed was dispatched from the camp to get support from New Jersey, and no more. He threw up his commission when every man's service was needed most, and when he himself was on special duty, which was as yet unperformed, without the knowledge and against the expectations of his superior. He recalls his resignation only to save himself from greater reproach than he could have borne, and if he escaped opprobrium he did so by false pretences.

## 16.

Reed's letter recalling his commission was received and read in Congress on the third day of December. A patriot father, who loves his wife and children, would naturally place them in a time of danger where he could most certainly rejoin them without changing sides. Reed writes on the second that he will attend to his office "as soon as I have disposed of Mrs. Reed and my children." It was a matter of import in whose hands he would leave them, and he had a choice. Had he sent his wife and children in the ferry-boat across the river from Burlington to the Pennsylvania side, they would have been among the patriots. He chose to send Mrs. Reed and her family into a part of New Jersey where they remained, as William B. Reed expresses it, "literally in the possession of the enemy" (*Life of E. Reed*, 255). Thus in December, 1776, Joseph Reed, having his choice of a place of refuge, placed, to use his own

words, "a wife and four children in the enemy's hands" (Reed's Reed, i. 273).

## 17.

So soon as he had thus disposed of his wife and children, as hostages to the British, Reed repaired to the camp of Washington, and crossed the Delaware with the American army. In the camp of Washington, beyond the Delaware, Joseph Reed, speaking to an officer respecting American affairs in general, said that appearances were very gloomy and unfavorable. To General Philemon Dickinson, whom he found in command of the militia of New Jersey, Reed, who had been deputed by Washington to Burlington to animate the people of New Jersey and gain their aid to the cause, said that he and several others of Dickinson's friends were surprised at seeing him there. This is known from the testimony of Dickinson himself, a witness unimpeachable and unimpeached, against whose credibility the most that has been said is, that he was closely connected with a man who was not a friend to Reed (Cadwalader's Reply, 27, 28).

## 18.

Reed soon left Washington's camp, for what reason is not certainly known. The knowledge that his intrigue with Lee had been discovered may have made his presence in the family of the Commander-in-Chief too uncomfortable to him, or he may have wished a greater freedom of motion than he could hope for under the eye of Washington. His pretence that he was specially sent by General Washington for the express purpose of assisting General Cadwalader is discredited by Cadwalader, and still more by Reed's own conduct in being

almost constantly absent from Bristol, and conducting himself as an officer at large. His despondency followed him from head-quarters to the camp at Bristol, and he said to the commander of that post, whom he pretends he was commissioned to assist, "I do not understand following the wretched remains of a broken army." Cadwalader was a man of truth and honor; his testimony on this occasion is supported by Reed's conduct, and by witnesses to similar words; and it must be received as true beyond a question.

## 19.

In his protracted absence from head-quarters, Reed appears to have passed but little of his time at the camp at Bristol. On the 19th he passed the night at Burlington, and on the 20th he, without the knowledge of Cadwalader, sent a flag of truce of his own to Colonel Donop, requesting an interview with him on the next day. On this much controverted subject it is best to consider only that which is certain and established. Reed was an officer without any command whatever; and though, as an individual, he may have wished to see Donop, he had no authority whatever to consult him on public affairs, or to settle with him any question of neutralization. Further, Reed said that he sent the flag on the application of some of the inhabitants of Burlington; but Daniel Ellis, his witness, fails to establish the assertion, saying only, "Joseph Reed was applied to by some of the inhabitants, as this *deponent understood*;" and the affidavit of Bowes Reed is still more rambling, incoherent, and untrustworthy, containing errors positively asserted, and then softened by the clause, "as this deponent was then informed." Further,

the inhabitants of Burlington never owned that the flag was sent at their request, but, as far as there is any evidence on the subject, they denied it, and represented it, as with Reed, a personal affair. Further, in his message to Donop, he pretends to write under the authority of Washington; and that assertion was false. He had no authority whatever from Washington to send the request for an interview; and he wrote, as he was forced to confess, of his own motion, without the authority of any one in command. What adjutant-general ever did the like? Further, the messenger by whom he sent the flag of truce was, to say the least, a doubtful character. Cadwalader, in 1783, writes of him: "I have ample proof of Mr. Ellis's attachment to the enemy, which may be produced, if necessary" (Cadwalader, 37); and this statement, as far as I can find, was not denied for more than ninety-three years, when no other exculpatory evidence is given than that the property of Ellis had not been confiscated, which proves nothing as to his relations in 1776. Further, the ostensible reason for meeting was said by Reed to be a desire to declare Burlington neutral, and Donop did not think this neutralization could be the real purpose of the flag of truce. Further, Donop refused to meet Reed, as he desired, and Reed suppressed this answer; and when, some years after, he gave an account of it, he and his brother, Bowes Reed, completely falsified it, making the proposition for a conference come, in the first instance, from Donop himself, when Reed had applied for a conference, and Donop had in the first instance refused it. Further, Donop reported the matter to his superior officer; and when time enough had passed for the British Major-General to receive and answer the report, Donop wrote again, as we

shall see, offering to meet Reed at any time and place he might appoint. Reed, as though the matter was a private concern of his own, made no report of it to Cadwalader or to Washington.

## 20.

Donop's refusal to hold a conference with Reed was written on the 20th of December. Under date of the 21st the following passage occurs in the Donop journal:

"Der Oberst Reed, der neulich eine Protection erhalten, seye dem General Mifflin entgegen gekommen, und habe demselben declarirt, dass er nicht gesonnen sey weiteres zu dienen, worauf ihm Mifflin sehr hart begegnete und ihm sogar einen dem Rascal geheissen habe;" which, being literally rendered, is: "Colonel Reed, who lately received a Protection, is said to have gone up to General Mifflin, and declared to him that he was not disposed to serve any longer, upon which Mifflin met him very harshly, and even called him a damned rascal." A question is raised whether the clause, "who lately received a protection," is a descriptive clause incidentally inserted by the writer of the diary, or whether it forms a part of the rumor. On this point I had the benefit of the opinion of one of the ablest Germans of my acquaintance—a scholar who joins to the highest culture received in the land of his birth an admirable degree of knowledge of our language and history; and he assured me that it is beyond a doubt a descriptive clause to distinguish the person to whom the rumor relates; and having this highest authority, I said that "the statement though made incidentally is positive and unqualified."

The "President's" grandson insists that the clause forms a part of the rumor ; but in this he can hardly be sincere, for, to give his interpretation a plausible appearance, he is obliged to mistranslate the passage, and escapes instant detection only by keeping the original out of sight. The words are : "Der Oberst Reed, der neulich eine Protection erhalten, seye," &c., which, correctly rendered, is : "Colonel Reed, who lately received a protection, is said to," &c.; but the "President's" grandson mistranslates : "The Colonel Reed having received a protection, had," &c. The error is glaring, as any German who knows English may see.

But suppose for a moment the grandson's interpretation to be correct, then it follows that on the 21st of December, 1776, Reed's treachery was so notorious, that the German officers at their camp-fires amused themselves with stories about the enmity of Mifflin to Reed, and about Reed's having provided himself with a protection ; and one part of the story, that Mifflin thought meanly of Reed, was unquestionably true.

But I believe the clause to be descriptive; as if one had reported in the last century : "William Pitt, who lately increased his debts, is said to be about to marry a peer's daughter." The clause, "who lately increased his debts," is a descriptive clause. If it be asked why I did not insert the Donop statement in the text of my history, my answer is, because it wants the mention of time and place for which I habitually inquire; and as circumstantiality is wanting, there may be room to ask whether the statement is wholly true, or only partially true, or founded in mistake. And which of these three options is most fit to be chosen must rest on collateral

evidence.\* My charge extends no further than that the "President" meditated defection.

## 21.

From the moment that the British extended their line of posts along the Delaware, Washington resolved on an attack upon Trenton. The British commander heard of it; common rumor repeated it in Trenton; patriots of Philadelphia knew it as early at least as the 18th; it was announced in a letter by Greene on the 19th; Robert Morris on the 21st wrote officially about it to the American commissioners at Paris. It is impossible that Reed should not have known it, for nothing was kept secret but the hour at which it was to take place. On the 22d he writes a letter of six pages to Washington, very skilfully drawn, advises him to do what he must have known Washington was preparing to do, and makes his letter such as he might be able to show for his justification under any possible contingency. He had written to Lee of Washington's indecision, and he comes upon this point in the letter. He had complained of Washington as too much influenced by the advice of Greene; he now renews the caution against such advice, at a time when Greene's advice could not but have been altogether on the right side. He had revealed to Cadwalader and others the unmanly despondency which had marked all his conduct for more than three months; he now, as if intending that his retirement should create no surprise, avows to Washington

\* William B. Reed writes, page 94 of his pamphlet: "A protection was never granted without an antecedent oath." This shows how loosely he writes. The Howes under their proclamation required no oath.

his dejection, and writes: "Some enterprise must be undertaken in our present circumstances, or *we must give up the cause.* Unless some more favorable appearance attends our arms, the militia officers here will take benefit from it [namely, the proclamation of the Howes]. I will not disguise my own sentiments, that *our cause is desperate and hopeless*, if we do not take the opportunity of the collection of troops at present to strike some stroke." (Reed's Reed, i. 272.)

Some hours after writing this letter, Joseph Reed rode from Bristol to head-quarters in Newtown. In the ride he had as his companion Benjamin Rush, one of the members of congress from Pennsylvania, and we get glimpses into the mind of Reed on the day of his writing this letter, through his talk to this companion of his travel. The conversation turned upon the state of military affairs. Reed praised the bravery of the British troops, and spoke contemptuously of the cowardice of the Americans. He said that "the author of the Farmer's letters had begun an opposition to Great Britain which we have not strength to finish." When Rush lamented that a gentleman of his acquaintance had submitted to the enemy, Reed said, that "he had acted properly, and that a man who had a family did right to take that care of them." (Cadwalader's Reply, 28, 29.)

From such convincing testimony there is no escape but by impeaching the veracity of Rush. The first question to be asked relates to circumstances of time and place. Was Rush at Bristol, so that he might have been Reed's companion? As a member of congress, Rush might have been looked for in Baltimore, but we know that on the 20th of December he was in Philadelphia on his way to Bristol, and that on the 21st he

was at Bristol (Force, iii. 1512), just in time to be Reed's companion on the excursion of the 22d. Next, we must consider the character of the evidence in itself; and if the substance of the testimony of Rush is examined, the words attributed to Reed will be found to tally exactly with what we know to have been his opinions and intentions, as expressed in the letter to his wife of the eleventh of the previous October, and in his conversations with Generals Dickinson and Cadwalader.

So far, then, the testimony is fully supported. It is glaringly unbecoming in the grandson of the "President" to attempt to impugn the character of Rush for veracity. Reed took the oath of allegiance to George the Third, seven weeks at least after Rush had declared himself unequivocally and irrevocably for independence. On the second of August, 1776, Rush signed the Declaration of Independence, and kept with truth and firmness the pledge which he then gave of life, fortune, and sacred honor; while Joseph Reed, a high officer in the American army, by his own account, "hesitated about his duty," and was sighing for "conciliation," "accommodation," and a return to a state of dependence. It is true that they both at one time called in question the military ability of Washington: it is also true that Washington forgave them both; Reed, as we shall see, on false asseverations; Rush, on a full knowledge of the worst. I once had in my custody fragments of diaries and auto-biographical sketches of Rush, written at various periods of his life, as well as two bound volumes of his most private correspondence, so that I was able to study his character thoroughly. He did not deny his faults, but claimed to "aim well." The key to his character is, that he was of an impatient and impulsive

nature, fond of quick decision and quick action, and in consequence capable, under sudden excitement, of writing in terms of extravagance, or judging character, for the moment, unfairly. As a physician he inclined to powerful remedies and the free use of the lancet, and in public life he was eager for drastic measures, so that he sometimes fell into controversy with men of a calmer temperament than his own. But the tone of his own opinions is always the same. From his early life to his old age, his patriotism could not be doubted, and whenever a question regarding freedom arose he was sure to take the side of freedom. As he was one of the first to speak for independence, he was one of the first, publicly as well as privately, to speak for the abolition of slavery, and to treat the colored people as fellow-men and fellow-citizens; and to his last breath he was devoted to those principles of Jefferson which were humane and liberal. The profession of medicine, no less than that of war, has its bead-roll of heroes who have defied death in the discharge of duty. When an infectious pestilence, raging in Philadelphia, rapidly swept nearly four thousand to the grave, Rush despised every consideration of personal safety, and was so true day and night to his patients that it was said of him in Europe: "Not Philadelphia alone but mankind should raise to him a statue." I do not believe, nor will my readers believe, that that man was capable of deliberately bearing false witness against another. It is established then, that, on the 22d, Joseph Reed did not refrain from avowing that a man who had a family did right to take care of them by submitting to British rule.

## 22.

On Christmas-eve, Reed, who pretends he was sent

to Bristol to be the virtual commander at that post, rode as a simple messenger to Philadelphia, without authority from Washington to deliver any message whatever. There can be no pretext that Reed should have gone to Philadelphia, though he obtained Cadwalader's consent to the journey. Washington took care to send his own precise and full orders to Putnam by his own messenger and at his own time (Washington to Putnam, 25 Dec., in Force, iii. 1420). Reed, having found that Philadelphia was, to use his own words, "near an insurrection in favor of the British," returned to Bristol. We have seen that on the 19th of December, Reed, making use of a flag of truce, was at Burlington, passed a night there and remained on the 20th, till he received from Donop a refusal to meet him in conference. On the 25th, Donop, who in the mean time had reported Reed's request for a conference to his superior officer, sent a sealed letter to Reed, offering to meet him at any time or place that he would see fit to appoint. Cadwalader, in Reed's absence, opened this letter, and thus discovered the unauthorized correspondence; but with admirable presence of mind he used it in the way that would best conceal his own intentions. While he was preparing on that very day to lead his little army across the Delaware, in order to drive Donop back upon Princeton, or Brunswick, or Amboy, he quietly wrote: "Col. Reed will return to-morrow, and he will then request you to name another time and place;" and before that morrow should dawn, it was the intention of Cadwalader to meet Donop and his troops on the edge of battle. Returning that evening, Reed became aware of the contents of Donop's letter. He wrote to Washington to expect nothing from below, that is, neither from Phila-

adelphia nor from Bristol, went across the river, and he who pretends that he had been designated by Washington to be the virtual commander of the troops at Bristol, left the troops, and without any pretence whatever of a public nature to justify his conduct, he rode on to Burlington, which was within the cordon of the posts established by the British, which was visited daily by their patrols, but where the message received a few hours before from Donop assured his personal safety.

## 23.

The "President's" grandson pretends that Reed returned from Burlington before the issue of the battle was known. Not so. The testimony is all the other way. The silence and the assertions of Reed are against him, as well as the testimony of Cadwalader. Reed asserts that he heard at Burlington the cannon of the battle of Trenton; now there was but a very slight use of cannon on that occasion, and the cannon were of light calibre; the wind was from the northeast, carrying the sound directly away; rain and sleet were falling; and Trenton was twelve miles off. Cadwalader got news of the result in three hours after the victory; Reed pretends to have remained in uncertainty for thirty-six hours. As to the time of Reed's return, his own account is very vague, but implies that he waited for a change of weather, and on the 26th the weather did not change. Cadwalader knows nothing of him till the 27th. The visit of Reed to Burlington at such a moment, and his stay there, have never been explained, on a motive of a public character.

## 24.

It is the rule of historical criticism to receive, ex-

amine, and winnow carefully all evidence that may be produced, but to give to it no more weight than it is fairly entitled to. The testimony of the humblest is never excluded. It is a very remarkable fact, that in a diary kept by Margaret Morris, of Burlington, there is an entry of the testimony of a woman who said, she overheard Reed, when he took shelter in Burlington, on the morning of the 26th of December, 1776, avow to Colonel John Cox, who was in the same room with him, the purpose of setting off to the British camp. The testimony is not entirely to be rejected. Reed, at the time mentioned in the diary, was actually in Burlington; the remark is in harmony with all that had gone before; the minute was made within nine days after the 26th of December, in a diary which was entirely a private one. There is no reason for supposing the witness to have been able to invent her report. The diary remained entirely private till long after the death of its writer and of Reed; and the character of the writer of the diary is beyond reproach. As there can be no cross-examination, the statement must be subjected to the severest scrutiny; and the testimony of Colonel Cox becomes most desirable. Now it is a very remarkable fact that we have his testimony.

## 25.

Men of that day saw the dubious aspect of Reed's stay at Burlington, and expressed their belief that he had meditated defection. Desirous to purge himself from the charge, Reed looked about for a witness in his behalf, and out of all men in Pennsylvania or New Jersey, Colonel John Cox, his most devoted friend, a man connected with him by marriage and bound to him by

benefits received, was the man of his choice to clear him from the imputation. That witness makes his certificate where he is free from the perils of a cross-examination, and he shows himself most willing to appear on behalf of his friend. The accusation was that Reed had meditated defection ; and his witness deposes : " Mr. Reed never intimated, nor had the subscriber the least reason to suspect, he had any intention of abandoning the cause or arms of his country, *to join those* of the enemy" (Reed and Cad. Pam. 64). The question recurs again ; and again he answers : "The subscriber had frequent conversations with the said Mr. Reed during the time of our greatest difficulty and distress, in none of which did it ever appear to be the intention of the said Mr. Reed to abandon the cause of his country *by joining the enemy.*" (Ibid.) Thus Reed loses his case by his own chosen witness, who expresses nothing at variance with the accusation. Reed is charged with the intention of defection, and the denial is that he did not mean to do so by taking up arms on the side of the enemy. This denial is a negative pregnant, and must be held not only to prove nothing in Reed's behalf, but to authorize the belief that the witness could not explicitly deny the charge. I have not the least reason to suspect "that Reed had any intention of abandoning the cause or arms of his country to join those of the enemy," but only that he meditated the abandonment of the cause and arms of his country.

I have thus traced the career of Joseph Reed from the beginning of the revolution to the close of 1776. I have shown that he pushed a correspondence with Lord Dartmouth until he gave a hint that the British govern-

ment might wish to have him on their side ; that, not making his way in that direction, he, on the exaggerated reports of the strength of the army around Boston, went in Washington's family to the camp ; that after the weakness of that army manifested itself, he gave up his post and returned to Philadelphia ; that on the sixteenth of February, 1776, he took the oath of allegiance to George the Third ; that finding Pennsylvania was likely to be a scene of strife, he escaped the necessity of acting decisively by leaving its legislature for the camp at New York ; that he disapproved of most of what was done in 1776 to bring Pennsylvania to moorings on the patriot side ; that on the 4th of July, 1776, he declared that "had he known the true posture of affairs he would not have taken an active part;" that when congress was signing the Declaration of Independence, he was sighing for a quick return to the state of dependence ; that in September, 1776, he resolved within himself to resign ; that on the first of October he sent his resignation to the committee of congress, to be accepted "the sooner, the better;" that in the middle of October he promised his wife not to sacrifice her and their children to fame ; that in November he calumniated Washington, and intrigued with Lee ; that in the last week of November he was sent on special duty to Burlington, New Jersey, and instead of doing that duty, he threw up his commission without being relieved ; that being terrified into a recall of his commission, he still breathed disaffection ; that he "did not understand following the remains of a shattered army;" that without the knowledge of his superior officer he sought a conference with Donop ; that he avowed his opinion that a man with a family did right to provide for their safety by submit-

ting to the British ; that he was persuaded the army would go to pieces by the end of the year unless some victory should meantime be achieved ; that he reported unfavorably on the movement proposed below Trenton, and believed that Washington would likewise fail ; that, pretending to have been sent as the virtual commander of an army, he separated himself from that army, and, without a public motive, went alone, or with but one companion, within the chain of posts of the British ; that a servant-maid reported having overheard him say to John Cox that he meant to go to the British camp ; and that the best which John Cox, a devoted and familiar friend, could certify by way of purging him from the charge of having meditated defection, was, that he never heard Reed say he intended to take up arms on the British side. Is it not plain that, as a public man, he was shuffling, pusillanimous, and irresolute ; that in moments of crisis he avoided committal ; that the tardiness of his decisions made them of no significance ; that his character was tainted by duplicity ; and that, as a vacillating trimmer, he, in the darkest moment of the darkest hour, meditated defection ?

## PART SECOND.

THIS brings me to the second part of our discussion, and I must now show that Reed's general character, as manifested by his conduct from the end of 1776 to the middle of 1783, instead of rebutting the testimony that

has been brought forward, justifies every doubt that has been expressed of his integrity.

### 1.

After the victories of Trenton and Princeton, the first anxiety of Reed was to recover the good opinion of Washington. To advance this end, he on the eighth of March, 1777, wrote to Washington: "I could have wished to have one hour of private conversation with you on the subject of a letter, written to me by General Lee before his captivity. I deferred it in hopes of obtaining from him the letter to which his was an answer. I fear, from what we hear, that he will be sent to England, and of course there will be little probability of my obtaining it. While he stays in America I cannot give up my hopes, and in the mean time I most sincerely assure you, that you would see *nothing in it inconsistent with that respect and affection, which I have, and ever shall bear to your person and character.*" (Washington, iv. 538). Now this asserts by implication that Reed wished to show Washington the letter which he had written to Lee. He does not positively aver that he has not a copy of it, but he plainly intended Washington should believe that he had not a copy. Yet he had retained a draft or copy of that letter, which has since been brought to light, and published by George H. Moore in his "Treason of Lee." Next, he assures Washington "most solemnly" that Washington, were he to read the letter, would see nothing in it inconsistent with respect and affection. The letter to Lee referred to contained among other things the following passages:

"I do not mean to flatter or praise you (Charles Lee)

at the expense of any other, but I confess I do think that it is entirely owing to you that this army, and the liberties of America, so far as they are dependent on it, are not totally cut off. You have decision, a quality often wanted in minds otherwise valuable, and I ascribe to this our escape from York Island, from Kingsbridge, and the Plains. \* \* \* Oh! General, an indecisive mind is one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall an army; how often have I lamented it this campaign." (Reed's Reed, i. 255-256.)

What shall we say of a man who insinuates a regret of his inability to show a letter of which he had retained a copy, and, concealing the document, gives his most solemn assurance of that which has not even a color of truth? On the fourth of June, Reed writes again to Washington, in a still more earnest strain, reasserting his respect and attachment, "from which," he says, "whatever my enemies have insinuated, *upon my honor* I have never deviated" (Washington, iv. 539). Was Reed nice about his honor?

## 2.

Pennsylvania was rent by factions at the time of the battle of Brandywine, and it was when these factions were at their height, that Reed, in September, 1777, was borne into congress. There, his ability, his acquaintance with the army, and his position as the representative of a central State which was the field of action, gave him consideration. His great achievement in the winter was the transfer of the quartermaster-general's department from salaried officers to a partnership of Greene, and two men who were his connections by marriage; and who received for their emoluments five per cent. on all their

disbursements. One of the two men was the John Cox whom we have just seen appearing as Reed's purgative witness. (Bancroft's Letter to the North American Review, March, 1867.)

## 3.

It was the fashion to court popularity by proposing rash measures. Reed in that winter advises Washington, whose army was in the most desperate condition, to leave Pennsylvania, and, without the supremacy on the water, to throw himself against New York; a system which, if adopted, must have been followed by the ruin of Washington's fame, and imminent danger to the country.

## 4.

Governor Johnstone, one of the commissioners sent out in 1778 to bring about an accommodation between the United States and Great Britain, wrote tempting letters to several individuals, among others to Joseph Reed, with whom he, like Lord Howe, in 1776, had been put in connection by a letter from Dennis De Berdt. That letter said even, "that Reed's name had been mentioned to his majesty with great respect." To the letter from Johnstone, Reed replied near the latter end of June, and his answer was couched in so meek a spirit that Washington advised him not to send it, saying, "an unfavorable use, more than probably, will be made of it." Yet the reply of Reed appears to have been sent. A few days after, but still in June, he met by appointment one Mrs. Ferguson, who was anxious to consult him about saving her estate in Pennsylvania from confiscation. In the course of conversation she professed to have authority from Johnstone to say, that

in case of a reunion between the two countries, to be promoted by Reed's interest, it could not be deemed improper in the British government to let him have ten thousand pounds, and any office in the colonies in his majesty's gift.

It was simply ridiculous for her to make offers in the name of the British government and the king, in reward for services which were impossible to be rendered. Reed heard the proposition, by his own account, in silence, but finding that an answer was expected, he made a very proper one, but not more decided than he would have done had he been disposed to a parley ; for he would not have put himself in the power of an American woman. The conversation continued upon the affairs of Mrs. Ferguson; but Reed, who had answered Governor Johnstone's written communication of the same tenor with friendly tameness, kept his reply to a woman in reserve for future use, and after a month's delay brought it out in an epigrammatic form. Mrs. Ferguson denied on oath "that the conversation had been kindly, friendly, or fairly stated" (Remembrancer for 1779, 141).

The Marquis de Chastellux, who was the true friend of the people; who was the author of the phrase, that the end of government should be "the greatest happiness of the greatest number;" who served most honorably and disinterestedly in America; who was a man of honor, and candid, impartial judgment; who so attracted Washington that after their parting Washington said of him, "I love him like a brother," writes thus about the offers made to Reed through Mrs. Ferguson : "Mr. Reed, who is a man of talent, a little of an intriguer, and, above all, greedy of popular favor, made a

great noise, published and exaggerated the offers that were made to him" (Chastellux, i. 166).

Chastellux judged the conduct of Reed from what was then known; but we must measure the degree of Reed's indignation by what the marquis never saw, the mild response of Reed to Johnstone, and by the following billet, written nearly a month after Reed's interview with Mrs. Ferguson:

"PHILADELPHIA, *July 19, 1778.*

"Mr. Reed begs the favor of Mrs. Yard to take up any letters of a private nature she may find for him in New York, and if she meets with any difficulty in this or any part of her own business, Mr. Reed will presume so much upon the politeness of Gov. Johnstone as to request his favor to her as Mr. R's friend. Should she wait on Gov. Johnstone on this or any other occasion, Mr. R. begs her to present him respectfully to that gentleman, and acquaint him that Mr. R. received his letter, and did himself the honor of answering it from General Washington's headquarters, at the Valley Forge, the latter end of last month. Mr. R. wishes her a good journey and a safe return, with all possible success in her business."

My copy of this billet came to me from Scotland, from the papers of Adam Ferguson, the historian of the Roman Republic, who was secretary to the British commission of 1778.

## 5.

After the recovery of Philadelphia, two Quakers were brought up for trial for high treason. What part Reed took on the occasion may be learned from a letter from the French minister, Gérard, to Vergennes, which runs as follows:

"The Quakers of different provinces meeting in this place for their annual assembly, it was wished to give them the spectacle of seeing two of their principal members hanged. Great consternation prevails among

them, but it is yet expected that they will yield immediately to the necessity of circumstances. As traits which characterize the manners of this country, I will remark that a former member of congress and the judge of the admiralty have undertaken to defend the Quakers, accused of high treason. A member of the present Congress was disposed to undertake the defense jointly with them, but as the time of the election is drawing near, he succumbed to public clamor, and he has, on the contrary, served as Assistant to the Attorney-General. It is proposed to indemnify him for the sacrifice, which is not inconsiderable, for Roberts has paid six thousand pounds to his advocates" (Gérard to Vergennes, Oct. 4, 1778).

It was on this occasion that Cadwalader said of Reed :  
*"It argued the extremity of effrontery and baseness in one man to pursue another to death for taking a step which his own foot had been once raised to take"* (Cadwalader's Reply, 23).

## 6.

In December, 1778, Joseph Reed was elected President of Pennsylvania. He had himself been one of the most strenuous opposers of the constitution, and received the support of those who disapproved it like himself, in the expectation that he would take the lead in the support of amendments. Elected to the chair, he put himself at the head of the party for the constitution.

## 7.

In July, 1779, the letter of Reed to Lee in 1776 once more became a subject of queries. Reed, then "President" of Pennsylvania, immediately took notice of them. The notice is remarkable only as showing the indifference of Reed to truth when there was occasion for vindications of himself. Here is an extract :

"In the fall of 1776, I was extremely anxious that Fort Washington should be evacuated; there was a difference in opinion among those

whom the General consulted. \* \* \* Knowing that General Lee's opinion would be a great support to mine, I wrote to him from Hackensack, stating the case and my reasons. \* \* \* The event but too fully justified my anxiety, for the fort was summoned that very day and surrendered the next. I absolutely deny that there is any other ground but this letter, and if there is let it be produced" (Reed's Reed, i. 262).

Now the letter of Reed to Lee was written on the 21st of November, five days after Fort Washington had fallen. There could be no pretext for lapse of memory, for Lee had preserved the letter itself, and Reed had kept the draft or a copy. But Reed risked the falsehood, holding Lee's written pledge that the letter should not be produced to embroil him with Washington (Reed's Reed, i. 369).

## 8.

Joseph Reed proved a most inefficient President. The spirit of Pennsylvania was noble, but its patriotism was compelled to manifest itself outside of its executive government. Of this there exists an abundance of evidence; I will take only Greene, Washington, and the French minister, as witnesses. In 1780 the French government proposed to send to our aid ships of war and an army, as well as money, doing every thing to interest the gratitude of the Americans, fire their emulation, and rouse them to such activity in the coming campaign as might be decisive in the contest. Washington was dissatisfied with the government of Pennsylvania for want of proper exertions to save the army. Greene, in a letter to Reed, uses these words: "The great man is confounded at his situation, but appears to be reserved and silent." On the twenty-eighth of May "the great man" employs in advance language of persuasive power,

entrety, and affectionate confidence, which the President was to justify by his acts, and thus wrote to Reed :

"Now, my dear Sir, I must observe to you, that much will depend on the State of Pennsylvania. \* \* \* Delaware may contribute handsomely, in proportion to her extent. But Pennsylvania is our chief dependence. \* \* \* I know that, with the best dispositions to promote the public service, you have been obliged to move with circumspection. But this is a time to hazard and to take a tone of energy and decision. All parties but the disaffected will acquiesce in the necessity and give their support. \* \* \* Either Pennsylvania must give us all the aid we ask of her, or we can undertake nothing. \* \* \* I wish the legislature could be engaged to vest the executive with plenipotentiary powers. I should then expect every thing practicable from your abilities and zeal" (Washington's Writings, vii. 61-63).

The patriotic legislature accordingly gave extraordinary powers, but President Reed refused to employ them. Upon this Greene wrote to Reed, on the 29th of June: "The general, the army, and in a word everybody have their eyes upon you, knowing the State abounds with resources of every kind, and that you have power to draw them forth" (Reed, i. 217). The opinion went abroad that Reed was restrained from acting by the fear of injuring his popularity. The judgment of Washington respecting this inactivity may be seen running like a thread through a letter of intercession couched in the most friendly language, but in substance full of reproof and complaint. Here are some of his words, written on the 4th of July, 1780 :

"Motives of friendship, not less than of public good, induce me with freedom to give you my sentiments on a matter which interests you personally, as well as the good of the common cause. \* \* \* The best way to preserve the confidence of the people durably is to promote their true interest. \* \* \* The party opposed to you in the government

are making great efforts. \* \* \* You have no effectual way to counterbalance this but by employing all your influence and authority to render services proportioned to your station. Hitherto, I confess to you frankly, my dear Sir, I do not think your affairs have been in the train which might be wished. \* \* \* I write to you with the freedom of friendship, and I hope you will esteem it the truest mark I could give you of it." (Washington's Writings, vii. 99-101.)

It is strange that any one should have been so misled by the sweets around the brim of this cup, as not to perceive the bitterness of the potion commended to the lips of "the President." The letter is a severe rebuke even more than a cry of distress, and proves that Washington had come to know Reed as one who was ever thinking more of himself than of his country.

But Reed could not contemplate events with the eyes of Washington. Instead of following the advice received, he wrote in reply an enormously long letter, and threw the blame of his deficiency on the people of Pennsylvania, whom he thus aspersed : "It is my firm opinion, sanctified by that of many gentlemen of more knowledge and experience, that the people of this State would, if too heavily pressed, more readily renew their connection with Great Britain than any State now in the Union" (Reed, ii. 288).

Such was the "President's" opinion of the people whose legislature had chosen him president. He did now, what he had repeatedly done before—he transferred his own infirmities to those around him. Just so on the 4th of July, 1776, when he quailed with fear and wished he had taken no part in the war, he thought there was a "universal" quailing of all about him. In November, when from helpless indecision he knew not what to do, he thought Washington was undecided;

and now, when he feared to take the responsibility devolved upon him by the Pennsylvania legislature, he threw the blame from his own want of heart upon the State itself.

The French Secretary Marbois, the author of most valuable works on the treason of Arnold and on the history of Louisiana, sets the whole matter in a clear light in his letter from Philadelphia, written on the 25th of September, 1780, for the instruction of Vergennes:

"The President of the State sacrifices every thing to the desire to increase his popularity, and obstinately persists in neither raising troops nor contingent, nor the quota of taxes, in the hope that, as the price of his trucklings [*ménagements*], he will prolong his authority beyond the limit fixed by the constitution. By his resistance, Congress sees the plan of finance of last March on the point of being wrecked."

## 9.

Events proved how wise was the advice of Washington, and how totally Reed mistook the character of the Pennsylvanians, and "the best way to preserve their confidence durably." This appears fully from a letter of the French ambassador at Philadelphia, written on the 19th of December, 1782:

"Mr. Reed, after having exercised in all its extent the power which the constitution grants to the chief magistrate of this State, after having for three years moved according to his own caprice a government composed of his creatures, falls into abject degradation [*l'avilissement*], appears oppressed with the hatred and contempt of most of his fellow-citizens, and to feel how transient is the favor of the people when it is founded upon nothing but intrigue."

The account sent home to England by Sir Guy Carleton, who was a man of great moderation and candor, after the arrival of the news of peace, is not more favorable to President Reed. General Cadwalader describes

Reed as "a rapacious lawyer, who never omitted any means of amassing a fortune" (Cadwalader, 52). In August, 1782, General Greene, who was Reed's friend, described him as "pursuing wealth with avidity, being convinced that to have power you must have riches" (Reed's Reed, ii. 387). The accounts sent by Carleton are: "In his private character he is a man of polite address, a good fluency of speech, exceedingly artful, much attached to his interest, and ambitious of being respected as a great man. He is possessed of some good qualities, but his avarice casts a shade over them." "Mr. Reed is a man of great abilities, possessed of a daring, enterprising genius, but said to be destitute of every honorable sentiment." (In the Letters of Sir Guy Carleton to the Secretary of State, of March 15 and April 13, 1783.)

## 10.

In September, 1782, there appeared in the Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer* an anonymous paper accusatory of Reed. The people do not like to see blows aimed at a man who is down, and the sentiment in Philadelphia in regard to it seems to have been expressed by John Armstrong, in February, 1785, in these words: "It is cruel when we consider the bed of thorns he [Reed] has sat upon for six long years, and the many disappointments, civil and military, he has met with." Reed, by his defense, forced Cadwalader to reply; but in my history I made no use of this controversy, except by happening to cite one or two lines uttered to Cadwalader in 1776, and which are no more than an echo of other words and acts of Joseph Reed himself. But, as far as character is concerned, the pamphlet of Joseph Reed is his own worst accuser. It was the study and

analysis of that pamphlet which opened my eyes to his hollowness.

It is discursive, and seeks to win the judgment of the reader by scattering attention over many subjects, some of which are irrelevant.

It would have been a complete justification of Reed's letter to Donop if he could have said that he sent it by Washington's direction; and he is obliged to own that he sent it on his own motion, without authority. He declares that he acted by the request of the inhabitants of Burlington, and his witness only testifies that he did so as "this deponent understood." He owns that he spent many hours on the 26th at Burlington, and he gives no public reason whatever for having done so. He cites John Cox as his witness for not having meditated defection; and Cox only testifies that he did not intend joining "the arms" of the enemy.

He appeals most earnestly to the justice and candor of Washington for deliverance; and the answer contains not one word of hearty approbation or enduring confidence. Washington alludes to his having sent Reed from Newark to the Assembly of New Jersey, as proof of confidence "at that time;" but he says not one word of Reed's having executed the trust committed to him. Reed especially calls Washington's attention to his letter of December 22d, on attacking Trenton; but Washington, who, if Reed had been the mover of that expedition, must have had the fact indelibly written on his mind, puts the inquiry aside as coldly as if he had dipped his pen in the icy waters of the Yukon.

But the great injury done to Reed's reputation by his own pamphlet is the insincerity and inaccuracy of his statements, proving a lurking consciousness that his

case would not bear a simple acknowledgment of the truth. Take a single passage as an example of the whole:

"In the course of our retreat through the Jerseys, I was dispatched on public business to the legislature of New Jersey at Burlington, where my family had retired. By this time the enemy had advanced to Brunswick, where they proposed to finish the campaign, making that their advanced quarters, as we intended ours at Trenton or Princeton. The time was now come when I conceived I might resign my commission with propriety, and I accordingly inclosed it to Mr. Hancock, then president of congress. At midnight of that very day, I received a message from General Washington, that, invited by the broken state of our troops, the enemy had changed their plan, and were rapidly advancing toward the Delaware, upon which I instantly sent off a special messenger to recall the commission, and resolved to return to the army and abide its fate. He was in time to deliver my letter before congress had met, and returned with the commission, with which I joined General Washington at Trenton the next morning" (J. Reed, 12).

*By this time the enemy had advanced to Brunswick.*  
Not true. They had not advanced to Brunswick.

*Where they proposed to finish the campaign.* They were then pushing Washington, and had not proposed to finish the campaign.

*We intended to finish ours at Trenton or Princeton.*  
Washington harbored no such design.

*The time was now come when I conceived I might resign my commission with propriety.* It was the time when he ought least of all to have resigned his commission, and could least of all have done it with propriety. He was at that time sent on special duty "to the Assembly of New Jersey, to rouse and animate them to spirited measures for Washington's support;" and he offered his resignation without the knowledge of Washington, without having finished the duty assigned him, and without having been relieved.

*I inclosed my commission to Mr. Hancock. \* \* \* At midnight I received a message from General Washington. The pretense that his change of purpose was swift has no foundation. Reed inclosed his commission November 28, and Washington's letters to him and the Governor of New Jersey were dated November 30.*

*A message from General Washington that the enemy had changed their plan.* Pure fiction. He could have received no such message from Washington, for the enemy had not changed their plan, and were then driving Washington before them, as they had been doing when Reed left the camp.

*I instantly sent off a special messenger to recall the commission. \* \* \* He was in time to deliver my letter before congress had met.* Reed's letter recalling his commission was written December 2, and reached congress December 3.

Thus the excuses of Reed are a series of false statements both as to the character of events and as to time; and this is but a specimen of the way in which he tries to bend facts to his own self-justification.

The historic importance of Reed was so inconsiderable that his career should have been left to oblivion, as the Philadelphians of 1783 were willing to leave it; but there was first on his own part, and afterward on the part of his descendant, an unscrupulous determination to raise him to a position to which he has no title. And this leads to the third part of the present discussion.

## PART THIRD.

IT was necessary to exhibit Reed in his true light in order to purge the pages of history of scandalous error, introduced in part by the "President" himself, but greatly and daringly enlarged by his elaborate biographer, with painstaking plausibility and an affectation of historical impartiality, but without authority and against clear evidence.

To carry out the cherished design of conferring exalted fame on one who had no claim to it, a necessity arose to rob the truly meritorious of their laurels; and, as the highest honors were coveted, to tear them from the chaplet of Washington. In the pursuit of this object, there was no scruple to destroy the reputation of the Commander-in-chief. No book that I have ever read contains such libels on Washington's conduct and ability as the biography of Joseph Reed by his grandson. The wrong is concealed under occasional words of praise, and under statements and language that wear the aspect of innocence and good intentions; but if the narrative is severely examined and truly weighed, William B. Reed will be found to charge Washington with imbecility, in order to make room for the ridiculously false pretension, that much of what was done best in the war of the revolution was done by the Joseph Reed whose character, career, and estimation among his fellow-men we have been considering.

## 1.

The first signal attempt by the grandson to injure the fame of Washington, and appropriate his merit to Joseph Reed, is made in the account of the retreat from Long Island.

For this he prepares the way by imaginary statements. He assumes that Washington, who crossed over to Brooklyn on the twenty-sixth, passed the following night on Long Island. He says: "Washington acted as if in command of victorious troops" [Reed's Reed, i., p. 222]. "Washington still adhered to his intention to risk a battle at his intrenchments, and the idea of a retreat was not then entertained" [p. 224]. Some hours after Washington had ordered the necessary preparations for a retreat, with the secrecy which alone could promise success, William B. Reed writes of him: "The Commander-in-Chief desired to try the fortune of war once more in his present position;" and so having represented Washington as a simpleton, bent on losing himself and his army, he brings forward Joseph Reed as the wise and sagacious officer who was just in time to save the country by overcoming Washington's perverse determination to fight, and persuading him to leave Long Island. [See Bancroft, ix. 101-107.]

## 2.

In an extravagant letter, thrown off in a moment of tremulous irresolution, Joseph Reed had accused Washington of an indecisive mind, and had emphatically written that it was owing to General Lee that Washington's army had not been entirely cut off. William B. Reed, therefore, to protect the reputation of his grandfather, does not scruple to write that Lee "arrived at camp at

the moment when the council of war was hesitating, and probably by his decisive expression of opinion, and his influence, happily controlled its determination "to retire from the island of New York. Now, in truth, Lee came with no such idea; and Washington had not only resolved on the evacuation of New York island, but had already removed more than half of his army before Lee's arrival. [See Bancroft, ix. 175; note.]

## 3.

The battle of Trenton is the great rallying-ground of Reed and his grandson. What did Reed really do about the battle of Trenton? Some days after the attack on Trenton had been resolved upon by Washington, Reed, who thought success impossible, wrote to Washington advising it, and saying that "favorable appearances must attend our arms," or "we must give up the cause," the "desperate and hopeless cause." On the night of Christmas-day he did not believe that success would attend the expedition. Yet William B. Reed, in his biography of his grandfather, even risks the assertion (Reed's Reed, i. 271), that "it is certain that the letter from Colonel Reed (of December 22d) had an immediate and conclusive influence;" when it is established beyond the room for a cavil, that it had no influence at all on the plan or the execution of the attack, which was in preparation long before that letter was written.

If Reed wished to influence Washington's conduct, why did he keep back his advice till long after Washington had made his decision? And if he had advice to give, why did he, who was at the head of Washington's staff and within an hour's ride of head-quarters, give his opinion in a prolix letter? His grandson insists that

the letter could not have been written to be produced for his own justification; for, says he, "if such was Mr. Reed's design in writing this letter, he would have kept a copy to produce on a fit occasion, and this we know he certainly did not; as I have said in the text, he never saw this letter during his life." "*He would have kept a copy.*" Of course he would. "*And this we know he certainly did not.*" And this we know he certainly did; for Gordon in his history quotes from it the skilfully selected passages that might serve to glorify Reed. From whom did Gordon get the extract? From Washington or from Reed himself? We have it under Washington's own hand that he refused to Gordon access to his papers; then it follows that Gordon, who during the war of the Revolution collected papers on all sides, obtained it from Joseph Reed himself, though his work was not printed till after Reed's death. So then Gordon's story of Reed's suggestion of the affair of Trenton is traced to none other than to Joseph Reed. That Reed was capable of attempting to appropriate to himself praise that did not belong to him, was observed by Charles Thomson, in Reed's lifetime.

William B. Reed, in his late pamphlet, seeks to renew the exploded idea that the movement on Trenton was of the suggestion of his grandfather, and to support that claim, from a speech delivered by a lawyer in court thirty-three years after the event, he quotes an allusion to an opinion of Mifflin, as of one who, at the time, was a member of the council of war. Now all this falls to the ground; for Mifflin, at the time of the Trenton affair, was not a member of the council of war, having been absent from camp then and for weeks before, so that of himself he knew nothing about the matter. From

whom then did Mifflin get his story about the suggestion? From Washington or Reed? Not from Washington; if indeed, so far as Mifflin's name is used, the whole matter is not a mistake, as the essential part certainly is.

Having thus disposed of the false value put upon Reed's letter of December 22, 1776, the question recurs: What did Reed actually do toward securing success at Trenton? And the answer is, as the head of Washington's staff, he did nothing; as the virtual commander at Bristol, nothing; as a visitor at Burlington, nothing; as a self-constituted messenger to Putnam, nothing; as a reporter to Washington of what was doing below, nothing, or worse than nothing.

And where was Joseph Reed during the battle? Every minute of the time, twelve miles off, voluntarily separated from the army, and snugly sheltered from the sleet and the stormy northeast wind, in a comfortable house within the enemy's line of posts.

Every word of praise ever given to Joseph Reed in connection with the affair of Trenton, can be traced directly to Reed himself or his grandson.

#### 4.

Again, at Germantown, when the divisions under the command of Sullivan and Wayne passed Chew's house without delay, and Washington, after masking Chew's house with a single regiment, followed with the reserve, and continued during the action on the edge of battle, the "President's" grandson will have it that Washington and his staff remained near Chew's house, and gives a statement that the halt was persisted in against the advice of Joseph Reed. Now there exists no evidence

that Reed, who was at that time not in the army, was present; and further, Sullivan's contemporary account, with which the biographer was familiar, places Washington in the heat of the engagement at the front.

Thus a careful examination proves that William B. Reed, in his zeal to ascribe to his grandfather merit that was not his due, libels Washington, places him as an officer below mediocrity, and supports his insinuations by a series of misstatements and perversions.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that with more elevation of nature, and more of the spirit of a martyr, Joseph Reed would have obtained a high place in the annals of his country; but, as it is, his career was that of a selfish and not very successful ambition, and his memory will suffer least by allowing it to repose in obscurity.

There never will be an end to the innocent illusions of family vanity; but uniform and indiscriminate praise destroys individuality of delineation, and takes from history its instructiveness. In England Earl Stanhope has written from the best materials a most interesting biography of the younger Pitt, with whom he was connected by family ties, by sentiments of gratitude, and by the affinities of political principles; yet he has not hesitated to expose the very grave defects in his character and conduct, and has obtained approbation for candor. Lord Russell writes a biography of Fox, which he designates as "a Whig life" of Fox; but still the licentiousness of Fox in private life, and the occasional uncertainty of his political conduct, are not concealed. At least four British writers of our time, three of whom still live, have directly or incidentally cast opprobrium on the name of Wedderburn; yet the inheritor of his

title, who furnished material for his biography, is not so unwise as to indulge in an angry flood of vituperation against those who had no object in view but historic fidelity, and who would have been false to their own honor if they had neglected to give utterance to the truth. | It is a curious fact, that this extreme irritability as to historic statements is greater in this country than anywhere else ; and if we accept the accounts of admiring descendants, our country will have produced a greater number of incomparable generals and faultless statesmen than all the world beside. Why must it be that, in discussing the character and career of public men, a greater sensitiveness should prevail among an adulatory posterity in this republic than in older lands ? Ours is the form of government under which there exists the least reason for hereditary pride ; and where least of all history should be falsified to flatter groundless pretensions. | Is it that because we are as yet so new, we have not fully learned the imperative obligation of the laws of historical criticism ? Whoever acts in public, subjects himself to public judgment. History is the high court of humanity, where truth must be heard, and justice must be pronounced. In this happy abode of universal freedom, individual men, even the best of them, compared to the people, are but as drops that glisten for a moment in the light, before they fall into the mighty and undecaying ocean. When a great English statesman was publicly complimented as the saviour of England and of Europe, he put aside the praise which was not his due. I apply the spirit of the remarks which he then made, to our own country. The American people saved themselves by their exertions, and will, I trust, save the liberties of mankind by their example. |

## APPENDIX.

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FRIEDRICH KAPP TO GEORGE BANCROFT:—

DEAR SIR:—In accordance with your request, I have carefully read Mr. William B. Reed's pamphlet, entitled "President Reed of Pennsylvania," and paid especial attention to that part which relates to the Donop diary, from which he accuses you of having "adduced a mutilated extract."

I purpose examining the question, whether or not you were correct in your assertion, that this diary alludes *positively and unqualifiedly* to Col. Reed as having obtained a protection.

I cannot help expressing my surprise, that Mr. Reed, in writing a pamphlet intended for the perusal of educated men, should adopt a style of vague intimations and irrelevant statements which would naturally suggest to those of his readers who are acquainted with his reputation for ability, that the writer is conscious of the weakness of his position, and that he has profited by the instruction conveyed in the old story of the barrister, who found nothing on his brief except, "We have no case; pitch into the plaintiff's witnesses." Indeed, his language and materials appear more like those of a village orator, endeavoring to vindicate an ancestor from the obloquy which more enlightened judgment than his own has occasioned, than those of a dispassionate inquirer into historical truth. He says: "he has [you have], it seems, been more successful since, but he had to go to the shameful records of Brunswick and Hesse Cassel, to the diaries and note-books of mercenary strangers, ignorant of the English language—'Ewalds,' and 'Bourmeisters,' and even '*Münchhausen's*' (p. 211), before he succeeded in finding what he seems to have craved so eagerly." Ewald and Münchhausen, here mentioned, spoke English well; the latter was sent as aide-de-camp to General Howe, to act as translator and interpreter for his countrymen. Mr. Reed resorts to the unworthy subterfuge of causing Münchhausen's name to appear in italics, doubtless to discredit your authorities by casting a stigma on the veracity of that officer, identifying him with the prince of mendacity and exaggeration; thus conveying the idea that Captain Münchhausen, who was in fact an able man and an acute observer of events, was an unreliable, although disinterested witness. With equal propriety we could doubt the ability of Daniel Webster as an expounder of the Constitution, for the weighty reason that a

Webster once existed who killed his creditor, or that there was another Webster who was a reprobate.

Mr. Reed resorts to a shallow artifice in endeavoring to enlist in his service the prejudice of Americans against the German mercenaries, in that part where he says: "I beg the reader to observe that I have not condescended to dwell on the astounding fact that an American writer, who on one page records the brutality of these alien mercenaries, on another, should ostentatiously cite a Hessian colonel's clerk as a witness against his own countrymen." According to this absurd theory, foreign authors are not only forbidden to write American history, but American authors are forbidden to write it from the testimony of foreign witnesses. Not only the jury, but the witnesses are to be selected by the party on trial. This ridiculous idea may be further developed into a rule forbidding the native of one section of a country to write the history of another portion, or to receive assistance from an alien in writing the history of his own province, and makes the standard of birth and origin the only legitimate qualifications of an historian. To my mind it is one of your greatest merits that you spared neither trouble nor expense in ransacking the archives of the civilized world for materials which would assist you in arriving at a correct comprehension of the events you desired to detail, and that you have impartially given the results of your researches, uninfluenced by personal considerations. Mr. Reed is of course justified in attempting to remove a stain from the reputation of his deceased relation, but if in doing so he willfully seeks to degrade your best merits, he commits a fault which cannot be too greatly reprobated. A Hessian colonel should not be a witness against an American! And why not? Is it because he was a mercenary? I condemn the sale of soldiers by German princes as unqualifiedly as any American can, and the history of that shameful transaction, as you know, was first detailed by me; but I do not think that the officers and men, who derived no benefit from the proceeding, and who came to this country much against their inclinations, are deserving of so much blame as their princes, who derived pecuniary benefit from the sale. The officers received no higher pay than they would have been entitled to if they had remained at home. They did not come as greedy, hungry adventurers. It may be a humiliating fact that they fought for the designs of another people, but it is seldom now—and it was much more so at that time—that a war assumes the character of a popular struggle, in which the soldier joins in devotion to his individual principles. That the soldier must obey orders, and not reason upon the necessity of their execution, is one of the fundamental rules of his service. I commiserate the officers who were compelled by circumstances to fight for a bad cause against a good one, but I cannot despise them. These foreigners owed no allegiance to the American Government. They came here as public enemies, and were

treated as such; but their personal integrity should not in consequence suffer reproach. If Mr. Reed, in a legal proceeding, had occasion to examine a witness whose veracity was untainted, but who, during the late rebellion, had conspired with the enemies of his country, who can doubt that he would speedily dispose of the objection that the testimony of such a witness was unworthy of credence? Yet in doing so he would effectually reply to the objection which he has raised to the credibility of Colonel Donop's testimony. The only proper subjects of inquiry should be, whether or not he had personal knowledge of the facts he narrates; whether or not he had any interest in the result; and whether or not, from any personal qualities, his evidence could be impeached. Judged by these tests, I cannot think of a more irreproachable witness than the author of this diary. That he was an able man is proved by his correspondence, and by the rank which he attained at an early age; that he was a brave soldier is shown by his being placed in command of the most exposed positions, and by his gallant death at Red Bank; and that he was entirely disinterested, and did not design to injure an American, are evident in his diary, written in German, which remained undiscovered until about eighty years after his death, when it was procured from an historical student of the greatest respectability living in Cassel, thus securing for it all the advantages which Mr. Reed claims for private correspondence.

What does Donop say? You give the material portion in the original, in a note to page 229 of your volume. Mr. Reed furnishes a correct translation of parts of the diary, on pages 89 and 90 of his pamphlet. He then says:—"So far what he says is pretty near the truth. Now for the camp gossip, which Donop was unwilling to listen to, and I beg the reader to observe that the portion in italics, which shows that it was discredited hearsay, is carefully suppressed by Mr. Bancroft." He then furnishes a translation of the hearsay, which, bearing no reference to the matter in question, I think you did well in not incumbering your pages by inserting, and afterwards translates incorrectly that "*the Colonel Reed having received a protection had come to meet General Mifflin,*" &c., making the fact of Colonel Reed's having received a protection appear to be a part of the reports detailed immediately before, instead of an assertion on the part of the writer, contained in an incidental descriptive clause. "Der Oberst Reed der neulich eine Protection erhalten, seye dem General Mifflin entgegen gekommen," &c. This passage contains the essence of the whole testimony, and on its correct construction depends the proper appreciation of the nature of the evidence. I impugn the accuracy of Mr. Reed's translation. Whoever made that translation either does not understand German, or, if he does, he has designedly altered the meaning of this sentence, so as to convey the false impression that the relative clause, "der neulich eine Protection erhalten," was a part of the reports; while, correctly ren-

dered, the passage reads: "The Colonel Reed *who recently received a protection*, is said to have gone to meet General Mifflin," &c. The writer of the manuscript distinguished the colonel, of whom he reports other things on hearsay, by this relative clause, to prevent his being confounded with any other man. If Mr. Reed had placed the German beside his translation, his disingenuousness would have been apparent to any German, or any one who knows the German language.

I remain, very sincerely yours,

FRIEDRICH KAPP.

M. GERARD À M. LE COMTE DE VERGENNES.

[*Extrait.*]

PHILADELPHIE, 4 Oct., 1778.

Les Quakers de différentes provinces se trouvant ici pour leur assemblée annuelle, on voudrait leur donner le spectacle de voir prendre deux de leurs principaux membres. La consternation est grande parmi eux, mais on ne se flatte pas encore qu'ils céderont immédiatement à la nécessité des circonstances. Comme les traits qui caractérisent les mœurs de ce pays-ci sont peut-être dignes de quelqu'attention, je remarquerai qu'un ancien membre du Congrès et le juge de l'amirauté se sont chargés de défendre les Quakers accusés de haute trahison : Un membre actuel était disposé à se joindre à eux, mais comme le temps de l'élection approche, il a cédé à la clamour publique, et il a servi au contraire de second au procureur G'al.

On parle de le dédommager de ce sacrifice qui n'est pas médiocre, puisque Roberts a donné six mille pounds à ses défenseurs.

M. DE MARBOIS AU COMTE DE VERGENNES.

[*Extrait.*]

A PHILADELPHIE le 29 Septembre, 1780.

Les mal-intentionnés sont en très grand nombre dans cet Etat, et les Quakers portent, dit-on, la mauvaise volonté jusques à ne pas ensemercer leurs terres dans l'espérance d'augmenter les besoins publics; mais indépendamment de cette classe d'hommes, le Président de l'Etat sacrifie tout au désir d'accroître sa popularité, et s'obstine à ne lever ni troupes ou contingent, ni les taxes qui lui sont assignées, dans l'espérance que pour prix de ses ménagements le peuple prolongera son autorité au delà du terme fixé par la Constitution. Le Congrès voit par sa résistance le plan de finance du mois de mars dernier sur le point d'échouer.

M. LE CHEVALIER DE LA LUZERNE À M. DE RAYNEVAL.

[*Extrait.*]

PHILADELPHIE, 19 Octobre, 1782.

Mr. Reed, après avoir exercé dans toute son étendue le pouvoir que la Constitution accorde au premier magistrat de l'état, après avoir pendant trois ans fait mouvoir à son gré un gouvernement composé de ses créatures, tombe dans l'avilissement, paraît chargé de la haine et du mépris de la plupart de ses concitoyens, et éprouver combien la faveur du peuple est passagère quand elle n'est fondée que sur l'intrigue.

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### PRESIDENT REED.

Mr. Joseph Reed is a native of New Jersey; his parents were persons in the middle state of life; he received a good education, and, before the commencement of the present war, practiced law in the Superior Court of Pennsylvania, and was esteemed eminent in his profession. The public papers will convey to you a better idea of this person than any thing I can say in respect to his character as a statesman. In his private character he is a man of polite address, a good fluency of speech, exceedingly artful, much attached to his interest, and ambitious of being respected as a great man. He is possessed of some good qualities, but his *avarice* casts a shade over them. This failing has so great an ascendancy over him, that he does not blush to let his own brother go through the streets of Philadelphia sawing wood, and doing common labor round the docks.—*In Sir Guy Carleton's No. 60, of 15th March, 1783.*

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[*Extract.*]

In Pennsylvania they [parties] have run very high, and are now headed by Mr. Dickenson, the present Governor, and Mr. Reed, his predecessor. Till lately, all the principal people were much attached to Mr. Dickenson, thinking him a man of very superior abilities, which, as a courtier, he certainly is; but they now find him timorous, fickle, and indecisive, an unfit character to govern a State in its present convulsed situation. Mr. Reed, his opponent, and head of the other party, or rather the mobility, is a man of great abilities, possessed of a daring, enterprising genius, but said to be destitute of every honorable sentiment.—*In Sir Guy Carleton's No. 68, of 13th April, 1783.*

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